

Leo Cherne:

Taking a look at a CIA-watcher

By Jim Kostman and Bob Katz

Last year, the Rockefeller Commission investigated allegations of illegal domestic spying by the CIA. Composed largely of men with previous ties to the US intelligence community, the Commission concluded that some abuses had occurred and made limited recommendations to prevent future ones. President Ford's recently announced plans for dealing with this problem include the formation of a three-man Intelligence Advisory Board. It too is composed of men long associated with covert politics.

Most interesting of these is Leo Cherne, described in press accounts as a professional economist and head of the Research Institute of America. For some 25 years, Cherne has been chairman of the International Rescue

Committee (IRC), a strongly anti-communist organization with the ostensible purpose of setting up relief operations in foreign countries and assisting refugees from areas which have come under communist control.

With this brief background in mind, it is noteworthy that in January, 1962, a young American former Marine named Lee Harvey Oswald, who had defected to the Soviet Union in 1958, wrote to the IRC asking for financial aid for his intended return to the United States. In December, 1961, Oswald had informed the American embassy in Moscow that he wished to return to the USA. The State Department then contacted the IRC and a Texas chapter of the Red Cross about helping Oswald. At the suggestion of the embassy, Oswald wrote twice to the IRC, initially requesting \$800, then upping it to \$1000. "After all this time our visas have finally been granted, thank

God," Oswald wrote the IRC on Jan. 26, 1962, "but our troubles are not financial, only if your organization helps in."

The IRC never stepped in. They informed the State Department that "as a strongly anti-communist organization, we would hardly be the appropriate agency for an American who went to Russia to live there." The IRC never even replied to Oswald, but the State Department eventually came through with \$435, apparently the sum Oswald required to sail to New York.

The Warren Commission Report states only that Oswald attempted between Feb. 6 and May 1 to procure aid from the IRC. But this account is in conflict with the evidence contained in the 26 volumes of hearings and exhibits published by the Commission. These documents show that Oswald contacted the IRC long before Feb. 6, and Oswald's letters from the spring of 1962, prior to May 1, reveal that he had already been assured of the State Dept. money. If Oswald continued to correspond with the IRC until May 1, there is no record of it.

There are many curious aspects of Oswald's attempt to get help from the IRC. In the early stages of his attempt to get aid, Oswald wrote to his mother and got her, with the help of the Red Cross, to contact the IRC. When the IRC wrote back to the Red Cross, they said that the State Dept. had already been in touch with them about the Oswald case. The whole affair, including the fact that the State Dept. wound up financing the return of this one-time defector, is one reason why many people suspect that Oswald went to Russia as an agent of the U.S. government. In fact, when Mrs. Marguerite Oswald alleged that her son was a government agent, she cited the IRC/State Dept. episode.

A few days after pointment, the connections to the subject of a *New* article by John Crewdson's story at least some of the IRC comes at ly from the CIA quoted Frank Worman Foundation was approached by a "mysterious" asked to pass ab the IRC for a n project in the E Andrew Norman, the Norman Foun called the incident but said the money was ear-marked for an unspecified Latin American effort.

The *Times* noted that the Norman Foundation was one of many institutions identified in 1967 disclosures as a conduit for CIA funds. The *Times* reported that the J.M. Kaplan Fund, also identified as a CIA conduit, has given money to both the IRC and Freedom House, an organization which publishes information on the alleged suppression of freedom in socialist countries, and of which Cherne is chairman of the executive committee.

Crewdson's report, if true, would have established the first definite link between the CIA and the IRC. But the next day, Crewdson reported that Weil had retracted the original story, saying that he had "misremembered" the crucial episode. Freedom House, apparently made nervous by the publicity, wrote the CIA and asked if they had ever been a direct or indirect recipient of CIA funds. CIA director George Bush assured Freedom House they were clean. When Cherne was asked by the *Times* why he never checked the Norman Foundation grants to the IRC for possible CIA influence, he replied, "That's the silliest question I've ever heard."

gence organization that preceded the CIA.

But we don't want to make too much of this. Cherne himself has said that the IRC is just a hobby. Men entrusted with keeping tabs on the spy agencies should be evaluated for impartiality on the basis of all their past endeavors — like the Citizen's Committee for a Free Cuba. Founded in the spring of 1963, its membership included Cherne, Clare Booth Luce, General S.L.A. Marshall, Christopher Emmet, also of the IRC and head of the American Friends of the Captive Nations, as well as Jay Lovestone and Irving Brown, of the American Institute for Free Labor Development, which has served as a CIA front for manipulating foreign labor unions. In a report published by Cherne's Freedom House, the new committee called for a new national policy to liberate Cuba "by all means necessary." This meant encouragement of hit-and-run raids on Cuba rather than direct US military intervention. The report suggested that these raids would not endanger world peace if carried out from bases outside US territory. The report also called for assistance to the antiCastro Cuban underground in Cuba "through every possible channel."

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